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# THE SCHOOL REVIEW

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## OUTLOOK NOTES

No class of professional workers has more frequent or better attended conventions than teachers. No class is better qualified so far as education goes to make such meetings interesting and significant. No class is better qualified for critical judgment on the papers and discussions that form the ostensible purpose of such meetings. As year after year the number of teachers' associations under various names increases, and the attendance at each meeting shows no sign of waning enthusiasm, it must be that on the whole these conventions are meeting the needs of those who convene. Yet if you talk with some of the steadiest attendants at these gatherings you will as a rule be able to sum up their judgment of the convention, whatever it may be, under two heads; they think the formal discussions, as to content and result, for the most part petty, frivolous, unorganized, unbusinesslike; they get their value out of the convention by the incidental opportunity for informal meeting with certain individuals. "These things, you know, are a great bore," said a clever man to me the other day as we were walking together, late, to a "meeting," "but I like to see the men, and now and then it is pleasant to hear the voice of a man you do not know, but know of, even though he says nothing of importance." Then, too, it has come to such a pass that many feel that they must show themselves at most, if not all, of the meetings which they might reasonably be expected to attend; otherwise they lose caste, get out of the swim, and become in danger of gracing the rear rank instead of leading the van of educational progress—at least in popular estimation.

Undoubtedly the meeting habit has been contracted by a very large number of teachers. The habit is a growth of recent years. The meeting together of teachers has been universally proclaimed a good thing—so good a thing that by no possibility could there be too much of it. The cost of attendance has become a serious item in the personal budget of many a teacher. The arranging of programs has made sad inroads into the time of more than a few educational administrators. The preparation of papers and addresses for the various meetings has made such enormous drafts upon the productive power of those considered competent to address the meetings that the year's work of many a man capable of better things may be summed up in the titles of his occasional addresses. Many a man must have a care, or his literary baggage at the end of life's journey will consist of small pamphlets and stray publications innumerable, not one of which will survive its owner's passage beyond the grave. For the many who can do this sort of thing well, and, perhaps, can do nothing better, all this may be well enough. But there is an overpowering temptation, and an almost overwhelming pressure for the few who might be investigators to compete for this transient popularity. How seldom do we hear in any of these gatherings a paper that is the fruit of scholarly research. In scientific societies such papers are, indeed, still tolerated, but not in so-called educational meetings. The staple diet of these latter is hash—so it be palatable and well served all reasonable expectations are satisfied.

Discussion is the life of a meeting. The ideal program presents a few living themes of general interest. Each theme is introduced, if possible, by two leaders representing conflicting views. There are no appointed disputants beyond these leaders; if they do their work well there will be no lack of eager volunteers. Spontaneous discussion reveals personality far more than set papers. The man who is appointed in advance to discuss a paper simply writes another paper himself. It may be urged that a number of prominent names on a program attracts a large attendance. To yield to such a consideration is to stultify ourselves as educators. When teachers come to admit that size

and greatness are synonymous, it is time for them to cease talking of training for citizenship and of teaching morality in the schools. Then, as the social element is avowedly so important, the committee on arrangements cannot be too careful in providing abundant opportunities for social intercourse. The teachers' meeting is an institution of great potential good, but it may degenerate into a mere spectacle of seeing the wheels go around.

In the year 4000 A. D., a graduate student in the Central University of the World took his thesis in an investigation of the dominant educational ideals of the last decade of the nineteenth century. Applying the statistical method, he proceeded to determine these mathematically by computing the number of times certain words were used, the one most frequently employed being the best fellow, that is, embodying the uppermost thought of the period. The results of this calculation were somewhat astounding, and more absolutely conclusive than any similar investigation ever made. One word—a word by that time obsolete for twenty centuries, and requiring an elaborate explanation to make it intelligible to his readers to whom the idea it stood for was in no wise familiar—not even through heredity—stood practically alone. In the final computation it was found that the leading word was used one thousand times more frequently than the next word in the list, and the use of all other words was so infinitesimal that they could be entirely disregarded. This significant word which so clearly indicated the overwhelming educational interest of the years 1890–1900 was the strange word CURRICULUM. The word that possessed one one-thousandth of the importance of this giant was the word *culture*. In 4000 A. D. “curriculum” had been obsolete for many centuries; culture, however, was still a well-known word; indeed, it designated the only idea of importance in education. When the investigations of the young scholar were published it was considered a very significant fact that he had discovered slight traces of the idea of culture in so remote and barbarous a period as the last decade of the nineteenth century.

LOOKING  
BACKWARD

C. H. THURBER